

January 27, 1963

PROGRAM: Week-end Report

ROBERT McCORMICK: "Back in Congress, Republicans are still hurting from the fact that the Cuban situation which they once considered one of their best issues, turned around and bit them. They're trying to revive it--the Democrats are trying to keep it dormant. NBC's State Department correspondent, Elie Abel takes a detached look at the scramble."

ELIE ABEL: "It's about a mile and a quarter from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, where the President lives, to Capitol Hill, but there are times in every Congressional session when those sixteen blocks seem a thousand miles long. That's how it is again this week-end, with Congress in an uproar over reports of a Soviet military build-up in Cuba--a build-up President Kennedy himself says he knows nothing about. The hullabaloo has been a-building since Senator Keating, the New York Republican charged that a military build-up was under way in Cuba, and that it was 10 times bigger than last July.

"Now the gathering and assessing of intelligence reports is a function of the Executive Branch of government, specifically the CIA, not of the Legislative Branch. But enough people remember that last summer the same Senator Keating was either right or lucky in drawing attention to the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba at a time when the President was either wrong or unlucky in denying any evidence of offensive Soviet weapons there. So the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Latin America called Secretary of State Rusk and CIA chief John McCone to testify Friday.

"We don't know what the Senators learned at that hearing; the testimony was, of course, secret and classified, but Congressmen are a law unto themselves. Rusk and McCone were barely out the door of the committee room, and they started leaking all over town. The trouble is the Senators can't agree on what they were

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told or what it means, and it's not just party lines that divide them.

"Consider, for example, Senators Humphrey of Minnesota and Symington of Missouri, both Democrats, both administration men. Humphrey came out of the briefing, told newsmen he heard nothing to indicate there was any significant new build-up, just about what Mr. Kennedy said Thursday at his news conference. Symington came out, talking about a big Soviet military complex built in Cuba over the past six months.

"On the Republican side, Senator Aiken of Vermont went Symington one better. The Russians, he said, have built an enormously powerful military and political base in Cuba--a base much more powerful than it was six months ago. When in doubt, and above all, when the administration story is somewhat contradictory as it has been on Cuba since the Bay of Pigs, Congress tends to start an investigation. It may or may not produce the facts, because Congress has no way of sending its own spies into Cuba. But it is found to produce headlines. Mississippi's John Stennis will conduct the investigation, and it's a good bet he will be recalling both Mr. Rusk and Mr. McCone to the witness stand. Elie Abel, NBC News, State Department correspondent."